

The Elderly Work Force in West Virginia

The state work force in West Virginia is remaining on the job even as they age. Indeed, between 1997 and 2002, workers age 45 to 54 years old increased by three (3) percent. During the same time period workers aged 65 and older increased from 2.1% to 2.5%. This proportion of older workers is projected to grow even more dramatically over the next two decades.

Why are these West Virginia seniors electing to stay on the job longer? Factors often cited include: the increased cost of living (especially for gasoline and home heating), the rising costs of prescription drugs, low retirement income, healthier aging, and increased job satisfaction.

Where are these older workers most likely to be employed?

1. Health services -	1562
2. Business services -	811
3. Social services -	736
4. Eating/Drinking est. -	624
5. Retail -	574
6. Car dealers/gas sta. -	553
7. Food stores -	536
8. Wholesale trade -	530
9. Personal services -	516
10. Real estate -	425

While there is a tremendous amount of variation in the amount of wages paid to workers 65 and older, on average they earn \$1,792 per month compared to \$2,442 per month for all other workers.

Another important component of senior employment in West Virginia is the Senior Community Service Employment program. This program provides meaningful part time paid employment experience in community services that ultimately results in unsubsidized placement in private industry or the public sector. Unfortunately there are strict eligibility criteria on age and income. Currently there are 678 individuals participating in the program statewide.

West Virginia needs to continue to encourage seniors who want to work to do so by shattering prevailing myths regarding older workers. Such myths include: Older workers are less productive than the average worker. Not true. Research indicates that productivity does not decline with age. In fact, older workers consistently meet the productivity deadlines of their companies. Older people want to retire as soon as they can and remain in retirement. Some seniors do retire, however, as we have seen in West Virginia this depends upon the individual. Older workers are prone to frequent absences because of infirmity and sickness. Research shows that workers age 65 and over have attendance records that are equal to or better than other age groups. Indeed, older

workers who elect to stay in the work force may represent a self-selected cohort of older people.

Only by allowing people to continue to be a contributing member of society, do we permit them to try age with grace and dignity.